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U.S. using spy-in-sky for war against drugs

By James Coates and
George de Lama
Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON—The Reagan administration's task force on drug traffickers is, for the first time in law enforcement history, using Pentagon, CIA and NASA satellites to spy on narcotics operations as far afield as California and Colombia, U.S. officials say.

Several legal and technological developments have made satellites a potential weapon in the drug crackdown, said John Lawn, assistant administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Lawn confirmed that the DEA is using satellites in enforcement efforts, but he indicated that high costs will limit that agency's access to the devices. "Except for the costs, it certainly is most feasible," he said.

Other officials, both in the intelligence community and at the White House, said that the U.S. has used civilian and military satellites to detect marijuana fields in the U.S. and abroad, to monitor smuggling ships on the high seas, and to photograph marijuana loading and unloading at docks.

MOST OF THE activity is coordinated by a governmentwide antidrug task force operating out of south Florida under the supervision of Vice President George Bush, officials said.

Furthermore, a high-ranking DEA official, who asked not to be identified, confirmed that his agency has "piggy-backed" aboard other government satellites to photograph both the continental U.S. and foreign countries to study illicit crops.

These satellite pictures are so accurate, officials said, that it was possible to distinguish marijuana fields from plantings of the coca plants used to produce cocaine.

Lawn said the DEA began to consider the use of satellite photographs in its investigations as a result of the murder of federal Judge John H. Wood on May 29, 1979, in San Antonio.

In the days after the slaying, FBI agents went to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and asked for

all satellite photographs taken of San Antonio at about the time Judge Wood was killed. The agents were hoping the highly detailed pictures would pick up vehicles leaving the murder scene.

LAWN, WHO directed the investigation before joining the DEA, said the NASA-supplied photos proved to be of no use in the Wood investigation. But he kept in mind the idea of using satellite pictures in criminal investigations.

Lawn said that when he joined the DEA as its assistant administrator, he asked the agency's branch of science and technology to study the possible use of satellites. "They found that it is certainly most feasible," he said.

To date the satellite activity has been conducted by the task force Reagan established on Oct. 14.

The multi-agency unit operates under special congressional authority to employ military aircraft, ships and other equipment in the area of civilian law enforcement.

UNTIL CONGRESS amended the law in late 1981, the Posse Comitatus Act of 1877 barred any use of military manpower or equipment in civilian law enforcement. The act, a civil liberties measure designed to combat post-Civil War government abuses, had confined the FBI to the use of only civilian NASA satellites during the Wood investigation.

Now, however, officials said that it is legal for the CIA and other federal agencies to provide spy satellite data to the drug task force—and they are doing so.

Besides satellites, the task force also is employing AWACS (Advanced Warning and Control System) surveillance airplanes to track drug smuggling flights and is using Navy ships and aircraft to patrol the seas, officials have said.

Another major reason that the task force moved into satellites was the role of Bush's chief of staff, Adm. (Ret.) Daniel Murphy, as task force director.

MURPHY, WHO served for a time as Bush's assistant when the vice president was CIA director during the Ford administration, has proved knowledgeable about what ships, planes, aircraft and manpower the

military and intelligence community can best use to combat drug trafficking, sources said.

In announcing that his task force would have 12 regional offices and be directed from Bush's office in the White House, Reagan said he would encourage the CIA and the State Department to cooperate with the FBI, the DEA, the Justice Department and other agencies in the operation.

"We intend to do what is necessary to end the drug menace and cripple organized crime," Reagan said at that time.

Early this year, administration officials began lobbying the new Congress for \$130 million to finance the task force operation.

Thus far, the use of satellite data has not yet led to any arrests, officials said, because the practice is new and is applied primarily to foreign countries, where U.S. officials have no legal jurisdiction.

"WE SEE a great value in it in terms of locating drug crops for future eradication and that sort of thing," said one source.

Other sources say the electronic intelligence helps in planning surveillance of suspected drug traffickers and their delivery routes.

Sylvia Thompson, Florida director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), said her group is concerned "that a Big-Brother 1984 sort of aspect is emerging" in the law enforcement efforts against the huge cocaine and marijuana trade.

However, she said the ACLU will take "a wait-and-see" position on the question of using spy satellites. "We recently debated a similar issue when the police installed cameras on the beaches to watch everybody as they came and went. Our board concluded that the camera was in a public place and, in effect, standing where a police officer might stand. Satellites would be similar to that," she said.

"It is possible to abuse the films later, we think," said Thompson. "They might keep the films for two years and then use them in an FBI investigation about an entirely different matter."

JAY STEVENS, counselor to the Justice Department's criminal division, said that the use of satellite pictures to spot illegal crops or other operations is consistent with constitutional guarantees against unreasonable search and seizure because of "the plain view doctrine" established in other cases.

satellite spying on narcotics operation a promising tool for drug task force

by JAMES COATES
and GEORGE DE LAMA
Special Tribune Service

WASHINGTON — The Reagan administration's task force on drug traffickers is, for the first time in law enforcement history, using espionage. CIA and NASA satellites spy on narcotics operations as far afield as California and Colombia, officials say.

Several legal and technological developments have made satellites a potential weapon in the drug crack war, said John Lawn, assistant administrator of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

Lawn confirmed that the DEA is using satellites in enforcement efforts, but he indicated that high officials will limit that agency's access to the devices. "Except for the tests, it is most feasible," he said.

Most of the activity is coordinated by the government-wide anti-drug task force operating out of South Florida under the supervision of Vice President George Bush, officials said.

Other officials, both in the intelligence community and at the White House, said the United States has used civilian and military satellites to detect marijuana fields in the United States and abroad, to monitor smuggling ships on the high seas, and to photograph marijuana loading and unloading at docks.

Furthermore, a high-ranking DEA official, who asked not to be identified, confirmed that his agency has "piggy-backed" aboard other government satellites to photograph both the continental United States and foreign countries to study illicit crops.

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Satellites, radar planes spy on drug smugglers

By John Hanchette
USA TODAY

Sophisticated new military satellites and AWACS-type radar planes are quietly being used to spy on drug smugglers.

The information they provide is being beamed to law enforcement agencies across the USA via satellites, federal sources said.

"We don't brag about it," said a federal Drug Enforcement Administration official, "but we use them all the time."

The technology is so classified that the Justice Department went to court in Providence, R.I., Thursday to keep it secret.

If details about the satellites become public, it could jeopardize the nation's defense, officials said.

The planes are new E-2C "Hawkeye" Navy radar planes — operating from aircraft carriers at sea and a home field at Norfolk, Va.

"They spot the ships and planes in unusual traffic patterns and report them to the Coast Guard, which decides if it wants to intercept," said Navy Lt. Robert Schmermund at the Pentagon.

The Grumman "Hawkeyes" are a mini-version of the famed Air Force AWACS. They are equipped with long-range radar units that can spot 3-foot buoys from 30,000 feet.

The Hawkeyes carry "pancake" dishes of secret advanced electronic gear atop the fuselage and a payload of computer equipment.

When a "Hawkeye" radar saucer locks on a suspicious boat or plane, the crew radios customs officials.

The brain center for the project is the federal El Paso Intelligence Center in Texas. On the second floor of this modern data center, the information is run through a full wall of modern computers. The computers



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have access to files from various law enforcement agencies across the country, including Immigration, U.S. marshals and the Federation Aviation Administration.

If the boat or plane has been stopped before, or has questionable registration, the Coast Guard and other agencies are authorized to intercept.

The sky-spy techniques paid off recently when a 110-foot shrimper with fake Honduran registry was spotted 100 miles off the coast of Colombia. It was loaded with 30 tons of pot. Eight Coast Guardsmen were flown from the giant carrier USS Nimitz to the Navy's nuclear guided missile frigate USS Mississippi, which intercepted the shrimper.

In the Providence case, Federal Court Judge Raymond J. Pettine was asked by defense lawyers to make the Coast Guard reveal how it had tracked a sloop laden with \$8 million worth of marijuana. The judge ordered federal prosecutors to release the information. Pettine reversed his order Thursday and agreed with the Coast Guard that disclosing the information would breach national security.

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